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WAR FOOD ADMINISTRATION
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Reserve

WHAT'S YOUR CLOTHES BUDGET WORTH?

Children's overalls that shrink and fade, children's sun suits not cut true to size, housedresses having colored facings which fade into the garment, slips cut like boxes from weighted fabric, men's shorts made of sleazy material, buttonholes that ravel, buttons that pull off, seams that burst, hems that pull out, these are some of the things wrong with the clothing, on the market today, that is costing consumers more than ever before. Always with us to some extent these clothing defects have increased tremendously. They add up to the No. 1 problem on the home front today.

Cotton clothing is especially hard to find. Homemakers have spent hours, sometimes whole days, shopping for just one article in this group, and then often have been forced to buy a different article at a higher price.

And that's only the beginning. Much of the clothing a homemaker does buy wears out quicker than the same items did before the war. Prices have skyrocketed. The Department of Labor says there was an average rise in clothing prices of 7.2 percent for middle and lower income families last year. That's a substantial increase in the cost of living--12.7 percent of the money families in these groups spend goes for clothing.

Where has it gone, you ask? What has happened to all the clothing that once was so easy to buy? A lot of the cloth, both wool and cotton, is going into clothing for the men now wearing Navy blue and Army khaki. It takes 136.06 square yards of all kinds of cotton material, plus 41.98 pounds of cotton that can't be measured in yards, to initially equip and maintain just one soldier serving Uncle Sam in his own country for 1 year! G. I. Joe needs a lot of wool, too--45.23 square yards and 5.95 pounds of it--to initially equip and maintain him when he's serving in the United States. Figured in terms of 11 million men in the Army alone, fighting in widely different climates all over the world, the totals are staggering!

A considerable amount, too, goes to our allies who are fighting shoulder to shoulder with us to bring the war to a successful conclusion. Cotton and wool clothing reaches them through the medium of lend-lease.

Even we civilians have a share in adding to the problem. As a nation many of us are earning higher wages and salaries than before the war. And, quite naturally too, we spend it. The things we've always wanted become our prized possessions. Mother, father, and even sister Sue get the more expensive clothing which before now they couldn't afford.

Although there's no shortage of raw cotton or wool, and the textile mills are working harder than ever--the War Manpower Commission has put them on a 48-hour week--they can't weave enough cloth to meet all our demands. They just don't have enough workers to do the job. Many thousands of their number left at the

beginning of the war to take jobs in aircraft factories and shipyards. Other thousands have been drafted. Their places have been taken by patriotic men and women who are trying to do their part in keeping our wartime machinery running at top speed. Many of them, however, have little or no experience and, although they are doing their best, they are unable to function as efficiently as the experienced textile workers that have been replaced. Net result is, that the total output of materials from the country's textile mills this year will be 1,823,000,000 yards below what we need.

With an ability to produce only a limited supply of clothing for home fronters and an almost unlimited demand from those who have money to spend, clothing manufacturers have either decreased or eliminated their production of low-priced garments, and have either concentrated on their higher priced lines or are delivering lower quality garments in the higher price lines. The great majority haven't violated OPA ceiling prices on low-priced merchandise. They've simply sidestepped them by making higher priced clothing for which the demand is great enough to take care of all their production capacity.

Hardest hit because of this manufacturing practice are those here at home who are living on relatively fixed incomes, 22 million of them, people such as school teachers, soldiers' and sailors' wives living on their husbands' allotments, and Government workers.

Added to this is the lowered quality of the small amount of low-priced clothing on the market. Consumers have seen the quality of fabrics drop until, for example, the counterpart of men's shorts they used to be able to buy in pre-war days for 39 cents now cost 55 cents, and in some cases as much as 50 percent of the weight of the fabric is starch. After one laundering such fabrics look like a poor grade of cheesecloth! Other garments have had useless decorations and luxury finishes put on the plain goods from which they are made and thus have had their prices raised above what the people with low incomes can afford to pay. In many cases quality is so low that it is wasteful of manpower and materials to manufacture them.

The quality of workmanship has dropped too. Finishing on many garments is bad, threads are left dangling, buttonholes ravel, buttons pull off, cut is too skimpy, garments shrink and fade and burst at the seams. Added up it amounts to inflation in the clothing field and a substantial rise in the cost of living.

This threat to the country's welfare, however, is not being overlooked. Several Government agencies are at work on the task. Several members of the Truman Committee are making a preliminary investigation of the problem and a quantity breakdown of the deterioration in quality in relation to price. The Office of Civilian Requirements of the War Production Board and the Office of Price Administration have formulated a pilot program which they expect will provide a break to the spiral of rising prices and decreasing quality.

The War Production Board and Office of Price Administration have taken steps to counteract the situation. Under a promising plan now in limited use WPB writes specifications for garments which include such things as minimum dimensions, minimum stitches per inch, the construction of the material to be used, workmanship features, etc. It sets aside a certain amount of yardage of materials which meet the fabric standards and allocates them to those manufacturers who are willing to make garments meeting the specifications and to sell them at the dollars and cents ceiling prices, concurrently established by the OPA. They are then released for selling to consumers.

A manufacturer who will not make this merchandise to sell at the ceiling prices formulated by OPA, or below them, is not allocated any of this set-aside material. And a careful check is kept on the garments by means of a code number all through their manufacture and sale until they reach you.

These specifications do not spell regimentation for the consumer. Garments produced under the plan won't make you or your children a carbon copy of someone else. Between the maximum and minimum specifications a wide diversification of color, style, and pattern of fabric is allowed.

The program has already gotten under way of children's garments, housedresses, men's shorts and shirts, and cotton slips. An estimated 400,000 dozen pairs of shorts, 85,000 dozen slips, over 125,000 dozen housedresses, and over 175,000 dozen shirts, during this first quarterly period, are reaching the market because of the program. You'll find the shorts selling for 39 cents, the housedresses, sizes 12 to 44, at \$1.49, and sizes 46 to 52 at \$1.69, men's shirts at \$1.39, cotton slips, sizes 34 to 44, at 65 cents, and sizes 46 to 52 at 75 cents, on the market in the early fall.

OCR cautions, though, not to expect miracles. Flaws are bound to develop in the program at first.

Consumers can help make the plan work by continuing to write to OCR about the garments they find serious shortages of, in their particular areas. When the quality of an article is bad for the price you pay, make sure it isn't just the supply of that article carried by one merchant in the town. The same goes for something you want but can't buy because the stores in your neighborhood don't have the clothes. In your letter give OCR a complete report as to your findings and it will get to work on the matter.

Make sure you actually need a garment before you go out to buy. Look through all your clothes and trunks. Often a bit of refurbishing will make an old garment look like a new one. Worn edges can be concealed by ribbon used as a binding, sometimes even big buttons will turn the trick. Floral appliques, strategically placed will cover up moth holes. Sleeves worn thin at the elbows can be cut off and made into short ones. Two dresses of the right shades can make a smart new dual colored creation.

Take a leaf from the books of the occupied French who have made war and shortages no obstacle to looking smart and chic, on practically nothing. Make a striped blouse out of an old one by alternating strips of ribbon with the old fabric, or use a wide belt to dress up an old frock.

Old coats, capes, and suits hopelessly out of style may often be transformed into elegant clothes for the children. A man's suit can double as one for you with proper cutting and making over. Scraps can make a tricky, tiny hat. Put the money you save this way into War Bonds, they'll buy a lot of fine clothes for you after Victory Day and help to bring that day a lot closer.

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